

## **Testimony in Support of LD2012 and \$2,000,000 Additional Funding for CAIP**

February 19, 2026

LG Austin, Brunswick, ME

I didn't know how nervous I was going down cellar to do laundry until the Comfortably Home team put 11 railings and grab bars everywhere from my shower walls to my front and back porches.

I'd gotten a pretty good scare last January. A hand railing pulled out at the top of the stairs in my 85-year-old, two-story home in Brunswick. When it let go, I bounced so hard down the edges of a dozen wooden steps that I was surprised to find myself in one piece at the bottom.

I was even more surprised one snowy morning a couple of weeks later as I headed to the woodshed. I thought it would be charming to have a fire in the stove. I didn't know there was ice — until I fell so hard on the back stairs that it tripped the emergency signal on my Apple Watch.

That time I broke my elbow.

Like 50,000 other women over 65 in Maine, I live alone. About every 10 days, one of us dies from a fall. (1, 2) Nationwide, falls among seniors drive more than \$50 billion in direct medical costs.(3) Home modifications save money and, I am here to tell you, drastically improve quality of life.

There's a certain sense of invincibility among those of us who remember when the Cold War had nothing to do with owning Greenland. We came out unscathed from all those duck & cover drills *and* roller skating rinks *and* even disco. What could possibly happen to us now?

After I took those two tumbles, my best friend kept nagging: "Get more railings!" As a retired teacher. I don't have a lot of spare cash. Fortunately I had some wherewithal — and a nagging friend — so I looked for help.

Godsend is a word used unthinkingly sometimes, but home modifications from Comfortably Home truly have been a godsend. By the time my elbow was out of the sling, a lovely woman and two exceedingly nice guys came out. No big paperwork drill, just a conversation about a line on my tax return. The median income in Cumberland County was never mentioned, but my numbers were below it. I'd fallen and the home I owned had only one decent railing. I qualified.

I used to dread waking up in the night to make my way down to the bathroom. And when I went out for the newspaper in the driveway, two steps on my front porch weren't much, but they were hard cement. Now the stairs to the second floor have two railings and a grab bar, and as I go down the front steps for the paper I can hold on.

I'm far from frail, but I didn't realize how worried I'd been about falling until I wasn't worried anymore. I've still got a lot of good to do in this world, and I imagine the same is true for most people my age. There's a reason this program that started in Bath, Maine has become a national model. I urge members of this committee to fund Comfortably Home in the Governor's Supplemental Budget. Let us live without worry in our homes, where we can keep helping our communities — as we have all our lives.

1) <https://mainecouncilonaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Economic-Security-Older-Women-in-Maine-Report-FINAL.pdf>

2) <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db532.htm>

3) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8681005/>

